



Patrick F. Leahy

Acceptance Remarks | March 12, 2012

Thank you, Christa, for that kind introduction and more importantly for your and Alexandra's leadership. It was meeting you and the other members of the search committee that fueled my enthusiasm for being the next president at Wilkes University.

And, thank you, Jack Miller, and the entire Board of Trustees for your vote of confidence. Wilkes is fortunate to have you as our board chair. (I will be fortunate to have you as my board chair.) I will do everything I can in the years ahead to validate your decision.

I'd also like to recognize the current president of Wilkes University, Tim Gilmour. We will have plenty of opportunities over the next few months to celebrate Tim's accomplishments here at Wilkes. I'd just like to thank you, Tim, for taking a good school and putting it on a path to greatness.

Before I proceed, I'd like to introduce my family to you a bit more formally: my wife, Amy; my daughters, Grace and Molly; and my sons, Jack and Brian. When I mentioned to my kids that we would need to attend an event on campus this Monday morning, they were thrilled. I thought it was because they were proud of their father. Actually, they were thrilled to be able to miss school today. My family will be a big part of this community. My thanks to the entire Wilkes community for making them feel so at home.

When I woke up this morning, I was excited. After all, it's not every day that a person can go from being a college administrator to being a Colonel in just a few hours. I'm thrilled to be the newest member of this Army of Colonels.

My first goal as your president will be to get to know this University community. So my first assignment will be to meet as many of you personally as I can and to learn as much as possible about Wilkes' rich history. In my early days I will listen more than I talk; I will be seen more than I will be heard.

I'm going to begin that assignment today. After we finish here, I'm going to meet with students in the cafeteria. Then I'll be dropping in on some classes, visiting the library, and stopping by some offices. If I don't visit you today – don't worry. One of my goals is to visit each and every academic department and administrative area in my first 60 days on the job. We'll have ample opportunities to become acquainted. I promise.

The challenges confronting American higher education in the coming years are intense. Facing these challenges will require all of our collective talents – faculty, staff, and students. We need to have a

shared vision for Wilkes' future, a vision that you and I will advance together, using Wilkes' current strategic plan as a blueprint.

I believe in general that we must look both at strengthening our core undergraduate experience and expanding our adult and graduate programs. We must look both at burnishing the liberal arts and growing professional programming. In my opinion, nothing prepares students better for the complexities of today's world than a liberal arts education. I think engineering students should read Shakespeare, business students should study the American Civil War, and so on. Wilkes has a strong tradition of educating students in the liberal arts and sciences. We must strengthen the traditions of the past as we imagine the possibilities for the future.

And, whatever we do, we must remember the important role that universities, especially urban universities like Wilkes, play in revitalizing their host cities. The future of Wilkes University and the future of Wilkes-Barre are inextricably intertwined. Wilkes must remain a leader in civic engagement.

Becoming Wilkes' president is an incredible opportunity. I feel at once humbled and energized. Together, we can make the next decade the most remarkable in the history of the institution.

Before we close today, I'd like to remember the late Timothy Healy, the university president at my alma mater, Georgetown University. It was he who first suggested to me that working in higher education is an important, even noble, calling.

Tim Healy once said: "The old teach and the young dream, and in that mystery comes a tomorrow that we – who are older – may never know, but will have helped to shape in the minds and hearts of our students."

I am proud to be your sixth president. I look forward to collaborating with my Wilkes colleagues to help shape those tomorrows for our students.

Thank you all very much for being here.